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EDITORIALS

HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

Every twenty-five years, on the average, the American nation has waged war with an important civilized power. Again, as on previous occasions we find ourselves involved in a great struggle, on the outcome of which our existence as an independent nation probably depends, with practically no preparation having been made in advance to meet the issue. Not to go further back than 1914, for three years the nation gamboled on the brink of war, making practically no effort to prepare for the struggle the imminence of which was apparent to every reasoning person. As we write these lines the daily paper brings to our desk a story from the Secretary of War, intended to be thrilling, of how, after war was declared, an airplane engine was devised for adoption by our government. America was the original home of the aeroplane, yet we began the present war as little equipped, to all practical purposes, to wage it in the air as were our forefathers of 1776.

This is but typical of our situation as a whole. When war was declared we had ample potential resources in men, material, and initiative, but we had no army and only an inadequate navy; and while these are being evolved at a prodigious expenditure of labor and money, the enemy is kept from our gates by virtue of no foresight of ours, but rather by the good fortune which has given us powerful allies whose armies and navies are fighting in our behalf.

OUR MILITARY RECORD

Thus has it ever been when America went to war. The pages of our history teem with disasters for which our happy-go-lucky attitude toward all things military is responsible. Curiously enough, in the very face of such a record, flourishes

a popular conviction that the history of our warfare is one of triumph succeeding triumph with monotonous regularity; and that with respect to our armies, if in no other thing, America has far excelled the other peoples of the earth. That this is all a ghastly illusion any one who has access to a respectable library can quickly satisfy himself. The simple truth is that our past military record has been far from extraordinary; that Americans considered as individuals are no braver than other people; and that when these individuals are associated in armies they require much the same degree of organization, equipment, and leadership as other armies do, if the record they make is to constitute pleasant reading for the nation that sends them forth to war.

It behooves us to note in this connection that no other type of human activity calls for so high a degree of organization and discipline as does the waging of civilized war; and further, that as a consequence of the industrial development of the last century the handicap of a nation which is unprepared to defend itself, in a contest with one which has thus prepared, is vastly greater than ever before. The ancient Gauls and Germans were able to wage a respectable fight against so mighty a military machine as the legions of Julius Caesar, and on one notable occasion, a few years later, a great imperial army was utterly destroyed by the forest barbarians. In modern times the small armies of England have marched at will over Africa, and the fanatic bravery of the tribesmen has led to no other result than their more certain and speedy slaughter at the hands of their civilized foemen. Returning to our own history, the American militiaman of Revolutionary days was no match for the British regular; and, popular belief to the contrary, the naval War of 1812 was not won by America. Even were the contrary the case, however, it would avail us nothing at the present time, for the art of warfare and the circumstances of human life have alike undergone a complete revolution during the last hundred years. Mr. Bryan's fanciful vision of a million men springing to arms at the first note of danger is but an empty myth, but unfortunately it is by no means a harmless one. The nation which neglects to set its defenses in order in advance of the emergency is, under modern conditions, doomed to defeat before war shall have been declared.